

CONSERVATION CAN BE FREE IN LOS ALTOS HILLS

In April of 1998, we moved into our 6,000+ square foot newly constructed home at 27994 Via Ventana Way in Los Altos Hills.

Our goal was to build an air-conditioned, energy-efficient home but without compromise to comfort or home style. Some of the features include 6-inch wall studding, extra thick insulation, low-E windows, Solatubes to duct sunlight from the roof to the first floor, and energy-efficient appliances throughout. Our home consumes a mere 2-3 kilowatt-hour of energy per square foot per year - a rate that appears to be about 1/2 that of what most new homes of this size consume.



Building an energy efficient home is only part of the solution. Energy conservation practices are another part of the conservation effort. Setting thermostats properly during the year, using the "chimney effect" in the summer-evening by opening the skylights and windows to draw in cooler air. Being aware of where the energy consumption is key to reducing energy cost.

Four years ago, we designed and installed a 3 kilowatt fixed ground-mount photovoltaic system with battery backup in case of blackouts. This system dropped our energy consumption to about 1-1/2 kilowatt-hour per square foot per year. Unfortunately, our lot is northern sloping with large trees on the south side that causes shading of the photovoltaic system in the winter. To counter this shading problem, we designed and installed a second 3.0 kilowatt, state-of-the-art photovoltaic system which consists of two dual-axes solar-trackers of 8 photovoltaic panels each mounted high on two 17 foot poles. This system, hidden among the trees, in addition to our fixed-mounted photovoltaic system, will allow us to produce as much energy as we consume on a yearly basis. Consequently, our yearly PG&E electricity bill will net out to zero. This is particularly gratifying since our wooded northern sloping lot is most difficult to effectively install photovoltaic panels. If it can be done on this lot, it can be done on any lot in Los Altos Hills.

Payback is shortest for the energy saving features initially built into the home. The payback for the photovoltaic installations is 8 to 10 years. However, this does not factor in the waiver of increased property tax for the photovoltaic installation or the increased value of the home if it were to be sold. In addition, we are producing peak power when the state needs it the most, sending it down the grid during afternoons in the summer.

— Jay and Jan Shideler
27994 Via Ventana Way
Los Altos Hills

BULLIS STUDENTS SUPPORT EROSION CONTROL AT BYRNE PRESERVE

Bullis Charter School fourth graders undertook a combined science lesson and service project at an eroding gully near Westwind Barn in late September.

"I wanted it to be like detective work where the children could look at the problem, identify causes and brainstorm solutions", explains Deirdre Crommie, who organized the trip with help from many different sources.

Roger Spreen from the Town's Open Space Committee was instrumental in finding the study site. "We are thrilled at the prospect of having the Bullis kids doing projects in our own open spaces", he commented.

The students learned that introducing native plants into the gully may help stabilize the soil. Jean Struthers, who helps to run a native plant nursery at Hidden Villa, kindly offered her expertise. With her guidance, students took cuttings from suitable native plants in other parts of Byrne Preserve.

When the cuttings sprout, the plan calls for the fourthgraders to return to the gully to plant them.

This project is the first of many environmental service learning projects we will be implementing at BCS", says Bullis Charter school Superintendent/Principal Wanny Hersey. "It fits perfectly into our curriculum, one that emphasizes environmental stewardship, hands-on learning, and social responsibility."



Town Newsletter - Statement of Purpose

To communicate current issues, services, and activities in Los Altos Hills to the residents of the Town and to facilitate, encourage and improve interaction between the residents and Town government. The 2006 Newsletter will be published quarterly in the months of March, June, September, and December. Deadline for the next issue is January 31, 2006.

Internet Address: www.losaltoshills.ca.gov

About Our Publication

The Town Newsletter is published with assistance from our Town Volunteer Committee.

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